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FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1686
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0055
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000188

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STATE FOR EUR/NCE, EUR/RPM

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [LO](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER GETS OUT AHEAD ON AFGHANISTAN; PM
FICO REINS HIM IN

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for Reasons for 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Slovak Defense Minister Jaroslav Baska announced publicly April 23 that Slovakia plans to increase its troop commitment in Afghanistan to 250-280 by 2010 and that the contingent could, at some future date, also include Slovak Special Forces. (Note: the current deployment is 69 and will reach 115 by the end of 2008.) Baska made the announcement at a joint press conference with his Dutch counterpart, Eimert van Middelkoop. His remarks were notable because for the first time that Post can recall a senior GOS official highlighted the inherent risks of deployment. "The Slovak Defense Ministry never deploys soldiers who are unprepared for these missions, and we do all we can to make them ready. It needs to be said, however, that the missions are highly dangerous, which may result in some casualties. We have to be honest about this," Baska stated. At an April 22 dinner hosted by the Dutch Ambassador at his residence for van Middelkoop, the UK Ambassador raised in direct terms the problem with Slovak caveats. According to Ambassador Obsitnik, Baska responded that he himself "wasn't the problem" and pledged to work toward their removal over time, as the Slovak public becomes educated about the notion of risk.

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Fico, asked on the fly by a reporter from the Slovak Daily SME about DefMin Baska's statements, responded: "You do not have the exact information. Our condition when sending troops to Afghanistan is always the same. The soldiers have to be positioned inside camps without any possibility of participating in military actions. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, it is a NATO activity. We are a member state of the Alliance so a modest increase in the number of our soldiers corresponds to our commitment without jeopardizing the lives of our soldiers. This is our basic condition."

¶3. (C) FM Kubis's Chef de Cabinet Miro Jenca told DCM on April 25 that he personally had been surprised by Baska's comments. Jenca said that the Prime Minister had given explicit approval on the increase in troop levels and on contributions to OMLTs, but he was not aware that he had signed off on the possible deployment of special forces. Jenca added that Baska and FM Kubis are in sync on Afghanistan and that Slovak military leaders had expressed to both that they did not want the scope of troops' activity, particularly in the context of OMLT participation, to be constrained.

¶4. (C) Lubomir Macko of the MFA's NATO office told Pol/Econ Chief that there was an unfortunate lack of communication between MOD/MFA and the Prime Minister's office. Divergent views, publicly aired, were the unfortunate result, he added. Macko stressed, however, that despite the PM's categorical comments regarding the nature of Slovak deployments, the overall outlook was positive: Slovak commitment to

Afghanistan was on the rise. He also speculated that once the additional deployments were in place and had gained experience working with the Dutch, the Prime Minister might be more receptive to new missions. Comment: By raising the special forces option publicly, before it was fully vetted with the PM, the new Defense Minister clearly overstepped his brief. However, we agree with the comments of the Dutch Ambassador who told DCM that while this episode is a "setback" in the campaign to remove caveats, he didn't believe it would have a lasting impact.

OBSITNIK